

Divorce and Remarriage

INTRODUCTION

This handout isn't comprehensive—meaning, I'm not trying to cover every point that could be made; I'm just addressing the three or four basics. Our desire is to write some position papers to place on our website that will be more specific to more unique situations. Earlier today we were talking about the need to have some think tank sessions and get it down on paper.

Holy Spirit, we need Your insight into some of these pastorally-sensitive applications to unique situations. This paper is only a framework. It's important that you get that. It's a framework. We take a few key principles, and then we ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom. Again, most of the time the wisdom is clear and straightforward. A small percentage is very unique, but that small percentage is thousands of situations.

THE EMPHASIS OF SCRIPTURE IS THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

Paragraph B. The emphasis of Scripture is on the positive, the sanctity of marriage. The main burden of Scripture isn't to tell us what not to do—to abstain from divorce in these situations. The burden of Scripture isn't telling us what to abstain from, but rather painting the picture of the glory of what we're called to, which is the sanctity of marriage.

TWO BIBLICAL REASONS FOR DIVORCING A SPOUSE

Paragraph B. Therefore, divorce and remarriage is very limited because of the sanctity of marriage. There are only two biblical reasons that are clearly laid out in the Bible for divorce. Again, this is the mainstream view of the Body of Christ that I know of around the world. The first one is adultery, and the second is desertion for the faith. That's key. I don't mean the man just left, but he left because you love Jesus. The woman didn't just leave because she couldn't handle it anymore, but she left because the husband loved Jesus. She said, "I don't like this Jesus anywhere in my home and I'm giving you an ultimatum: Either you deny Him or I leave." That's called *desertion*. It's a unique situation because it's not just incompatibility; it's far stronger than that.

This is a difficult subject because it's so deeply personal. If you end up in a situation where your life could be in real difficulty by obeying the Scriptures, it's very personal. Even as a ministry team, we don't have a calloused, "Get with it," or, "I'm sorry, tough luck." We want a spirit of grace in the whole dialogue, in the whole process of people discovering. The discovery process is, "Lord, what is the will of God for my life now that I'm in this situation?"

We want grace. We want grace for the people who don't obey the Lord. In other words, we want tenderness and kindness. We want to seek to be honoring in our spirit, for the very tone of the relationship is to have grace before, during, and after this takes place. In the midst of this, we want to be faithful witnesses. We want to stand for the truth. Though many believe the things I'm going to share today, it's becoming less and less mentioned. Many believe it, but they're getting to the place where they only believe it in the back room, and they refuse to take a stand publicly. The reason they believe it is because it's pretty straightforward in the Bible. There are a whole lot more people who are looking for loopholes. They're searching the Scriptures for loopholes. Though I want to have grace, I want to be faithful as a leadership team as the Holy Spirit is in our midst and the eyes of the Lord are upon us.

The Lord is giving us stewardship of a youth movement. The Lord is saying, “I want you faithful to put this foundation in the lives of these young people.” The Lord wants them to understand the sanctity of marriage. Maybe they didn’t see it in their home. Maybe it’s a new idea. They’ve never heard it in the Church. The Lord wants us to impart this so that they have clarity and zeal about it. When difficult times come to their life and their marriage, which happens so often even in the midst of godly people, they’ll have a foundation of conviction that they’ll stand through the difficulty and let that season pass, and the Lord brings recovery and healing.

As for the people who have gone through a divorce and been remarried, this isn’t a time for everyone to have an opinion about what they could have, or should have, or what you would have done. That is not a good time to insert our opinions. Again, it’s a time for grace, for mercy, for tenderness, for sensitivity. I can’t stress that enough. Though on one hand we want to hold the standard, on the other hand we want to do it in a spirit of meekness and a spirit of tenderness. Some people get these principles down and they get into that know-it-all spirit and they know what they would do if they had been there. Maybe they’ve only been married for five years; they certainly haven’t been married for forty years. I appeal to people to have tenderness in their hearts, because who knows the full situation that a person is facing? I just want to put that tenderness into the presentation of this so that we don’t end up being zealots with truth and we hack each other to death with the sword of the Spirit. That isn’t what we want.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS BIGGER THAN YOUR DULL EMOTIONS

Paragraph C. As an example of the importance of marriage, God connects the power of prayer to the sanctity of the marriage covenant. It’s a remarkable truth in Scripture. He actually tells us husbands that the way we treat our wives even when we don’t like them is connected to prayer.

How many of you know that you can not like your wife and still honor her and serve her? It’s true. I’m not saying it’s wise for you to raise your hands right now. I’m saying that theoretically you’ve heard of that. That’s a funny point in a meeting like this. It isn’t funny in real life. The reason I bring it up is because some people have told me over the years, “I don’t love her anymore.”

I say, “I’m sad about that, but I tell you one thing: God so honors the marriage covenant that if you’ll lean into it with humility and servanthood, the Spirit of God is bigger than your dull emotions.”

Your dull emotions can be ignited by the power of the Holy Spirit when you honor the covenant, because that’s how committed to the covenant God is.

The man says, “I don’t like her anymore.”

It isn’t, “Well, tough luck.” It’s more like, “Ouch, that hurts.”

That isn’t the end of the story. There’s a story that’s yet to unfold. It isn’t just, “I don’t like her; she’s really mean to me in ways you don’t know.” Ouch again. Still, we honor her. I’m talking to the men. We serve her. We intercede for her and we bear injustice. That is what we do.

We’ll get into it in a moment, but in the case of adultery, the Lord allows us to get divorced. I’m not talking about that right now. Right now I’m addressing the people who say, “I don’t like her, and, even worse, she

doesn't like me. It's worse than that: she's assaulting me in ways you don't know." I understand. The covenant is bigger than all of those difficulties. I'm really saying this, not to those who are fifty years old, but to those who are twenty years old. I'm saying this to all of us so that we can sow this into the twenty-year olds, so that we're one of those ministries where honouring the covenant is normative instead of strange. I believe God is raising up ministries like this all over the world that will honor the marriage covenant. For the children growing up in it, it won't be strange. They'll say, "Of course; that's all we ever knew in the ministry I was a part of." We want to be one of those ministries that have that testimony when our five-year olds turn fifteen and twenty-five and thirty-five. They'll say, "Everyone honored the covenant, and a lot of people did it at a great price, but they held the line because they loved God and they trusted the Holy Spirit to work."

THE POWER OF PRAYER IS CONNECTED TO THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

Here is a profound example of connecting the power of prayer to the marriage covenant. In Malachi 2:13, the prophet is talking about the prayer ministry; he's talking about intercession. He says, "You cover the altar of the Lord with tears" (Mal. 2:13). The altar of the Lord was the place of prayer. Malachi is referencing the altar spoken of in Joel: "Come and weep between the porch and the altar; come to the altar of God in intercession" (Joel 2:17, paraphrased). He says, "You cover the altar with tears. You're impassioned, you're burdened, you're moved, you're engaged in prayer. Those tears are not fake. You're really moved, but God doesn't regard your prayer. You bring your offering of intercession, and God says no."

"But Lord, I've been coming before you. You said, 'Come between the porch and the altar, the presence of God, and cry out in intercession,' but You don't listen. You don't regard my prayers."

He's talking to the leadership of Israel right here. He's talking to the spiritual leaders of Israel. They're the only ones who can go close to that altar. In theory, the top leaders of the land, the main intercessors, are the only ones who can approach it.

The Lord is having this conversation with the main leaders of Israel. "You say, 'What's the reason? This is so mysterious. We cry out, we pray and fast, but You won't answer us. What's the reason? We know the Bible. We can't find the reason.'"

The Lord says, "Don't be confused anymore. It's because I'm a witness: I have watched with My eyes wide open; I watch the wife of your youth, and how you treat her. I watch it. I see you cry out for the power of God, but I see how you treat your wife. I'm a witness to it" (Mal. 2:14, paraphrased).

He gives her two titles, or two descriptions: "the wife of your youth," and the "wife by covenant." The reason she's called, "the wife of your youth," is because she's the one you married thirty or forty years ago when you were both in your twenties. She's the wife you had when you were both young. The point is that now they're older and he wants a younger wife. He says, "A lot of bad water is under the bridge, and we don't connect anymore, and she's bitter." Well, you helped get her there. You did.

"No, no. It was her choices."

If we represent Jesus, we need to have an atmosphere in our home where it's hard for our wife to get bitter and stay bitter because we're minister of graces. That is another subject for another day.

She's bitter. It's thirty or forty years later, and she doesn't look the same. Neither do you—just FYI. God says, "I'm watching. I'm a witness."

"Lord, I want you to watch the prayer room."

He says, "I'm a witness to the prayer room, but I'm a witness also to your house, to your homes, and how you treat her." He says, "Let me tell you what's happening. You're dealing treacherously with her."

Treacherously. These are the top spiritual leaders of Israel. Treacherously? Malachi had to give that message. This was not an audible voice of God, like they heard from Mount Sinai with Moses. Malachi, a man, is the one saying this. "Yes, the Lord said *treacherous*."

"What did you say?"

He's standing before the top leaders of the nation.

He says, "Ahem, you men are dealing treacherously with those ladies. That is what God says."

I can just imagine the messenger having to say that to thirty or forty top leaders, the top leaders of the nation. "God doesn't hear your prayers anymore. Shut the door, stop the prayer meeting; you're wasting your time because there's a spirit of treachery."

They say, "Treachery? We're dignified leaders. We paid our dues for thirty or forty years. We have been raised up through the ranks. We're the top leaders in the land. What do you mean *treachery*?"

He says, "That is how God sees it."

We have to come into agreement with God. The reason it's treachery is because she's your wife by covenant, and the covenant is more serious than you know.

"FOR THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL SAYS THAT HE HATES DIVORCE"

Then he goes on in verse 16: "The Lord . . . hates divorce" (Mal. 2:16). He hates it.

Here's what he meant: you have to get the context. He hates it when men abandon their wives because their wives bug them or don't interest them anymore. He hates it. He hates it.

Malachi says, "You've been together for twenty, thirty, or forty years. Now things are different. You have more power and more money. You're more established. You don't like her anymore, she doesn't like you anymore, and you just ignore the covenant."

The Lord says, "I hate it when my men do that. I hate it."

Then he warned the leaders, "Take heed to your spirit. Pay attention." Beloved, I have watched this sneak up on men over the years. They assume it will never, ever sneak up on them. He says, "Take heed to your spirit. Be

very careful. Don't deal treacherously with that woman. Don't you dare do that and then go to a prayer meeting and cry out for the power of God. God will not hear you."

YOU CAN'T BIND JESUS IN THE NAME OF JESUS

Five hundred years later, Peter comes along and says the same thing. He says, "Husbands, honor your wives. If you don't, your prayers will be hindered by God" (1 Pet. 3:7, paraphrased).

I tell you, it's really hard to bind Jesus in the name of Jesus. Jesus is leaning against the door and we're on the other side saying, "I command that door to open in the name of Jesus! I bind that hindering force!"

The Lord is on the other side of the door saying, "You can't bind Me by My own name. I want you to honor that woman." Again, we think of the ideal situation and it's easy, but we're talking about after some time has gone by— or maybe it's still early on. She's not responding the way that she used to. I lost that loving feeling. It isn't there. He says, "You honor her. You serve her. You lean into the covenant and you serve her with gladness. Don't mention to her how much you're serving her. You do it with My eyes as a witness on you and your prayer life will be far more effective."

I think it's amazing that God connects the way men treat women to the prayer movement. We're in the generation where we believe the prayer movement is exploding worldwide. I assure you this: the honor of the covenant, the sanctity of marriage will go like railroad tracks. Those tracks—the explosion of the prayer movement and the sanctity of marriage—will run together.

CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH DIVORCE IS AN OPTION

Here's the last thing I'm going to say here—at the end of paragraph C. I mention it in the last sentence. God hates divorce. He hates it.

Here's the wrong application of this. The gal has been married, the guy has been out committing adultery, the marriage is destroyed, she has the biblical allowance for divorce, and she doesn't even want divorce. She's trying to make it work. Not only is this man disregarding the covenant, he's bringing disease into the home; he's bringing so much harm to the family, and she needs to divorce him. God doesn't command anyone to do it, but he says you're allowed to do that. Ask the Holy Spirit.

I've heard this over the years: the lady says, "I can't get a divorce. God hates divorce."

I say, "No, God doesn't hate you applying this in that situation in your home. He hates what happened that made this necessary."

Though He does hate divorce, He's not saying He hates the person who needs to hold the line, because of several reasons—because the spouse is being sexually unfaithful and he won't stop. Again, it's not just unfaithfulness to the covenant; there's disease, there are financial issues, there are children. There are so many complications that go with this; I don't want to try and address it all. You seek the Lord for restoration, but if it's not there, there's a time when you move on. The Lord says, "I don't hate you for moving on. I want you to know that. I don't hate that you moved on. I hate the situation that put you in this situation."

I wanted to make that clear. I have seen some of the godliest women get beaten up by that verse because they don't know the context.

DIVORCE IS ALLOWED IN THE CASE OF ADULTERY

II. Divorce is allowed for adultery. In a moment we're going to look at the fact that divorce is allowed for desertion. Again, it's desertion because of the faith. Matthew 19 is the main passage in the Bible in which Jesus addresses the issue of divorce and remarriage. All of His other statements need to connect with this larger statement. We want to bring all of His statements together, but this is the trunk of the tree, so to speak, and all the other statements are branches, extensions, of this primary time in the Bible where Jesus gave His views.

The primary time in the Bible where Paul gave his views is in 1 Corinthians 7. Those are the two main passages, though there are plenty of other smaller passages: Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7. What's happening here in Matthew 19 is that the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus. There was a big controversy among the leaders of Israel in that day. There were two camps among the rabbis. Camp number one had high standards for marriage and high standards for divorce—meaning they only permitted divorce in grievous situations. They were holding the line on the sanctity of marriage.

But there was another camp. There were two main camps. This second camp would divorce for any kind of incompatibility. "You know what? I just don't like her anymore. I can come up with a reason why I don't want to stay with her." They were very low standards. In the city of Jerusalem the camp was divided. There were those who held the line, with high standards, and there were those with very loose standards. Again, if there was any kind of incompatibility, they wanted to get a divorce.

They asked Jesus the question, so He had to weigh in on it, which meant that He had at least half a group of Jerusalem against Him. It was a total setup. It says here in Matthew 19, in the verse just before, that they were testing Him (Mt. 19:3). They were trying to trick Him. They were making Him answer in such a way that at least one group of the leadership was against Him.

"IS IT LAWFUL FOR A MAN TO DIVORCE HIS WIFE FOR ANY REASON?"

Paragraph B. Matthew 19:3. The question was, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason" (Mt. 19:3)? That's the real issue: for any reason. They're all looking at this young Man in his early thirties, thinking, "You've never been to Bible school, You've never been to seminary, You think You really know the Bible. What's the answer? Are there only a few reasons, or any reason?"

Whichever answer Jesus gave, He was going to have a whole lot of enemies right there on the spot. Just so you know, that's the situation that the end-time church will be in. Whatever answer they give, they're going to have a lot of people mad at them. Our goal isn't to take a poll and figure out how to get the largest group of people on our team. The goal is to be faithful to Jesus and for us to be a faithful witness to the next generation, to the people who are five, ten, fifteen, and twenty years old, so that they have conviction and clarity about the sanctity of marriage.

Jesus skipped the debate. The debate that they wanted Him to be drawn into was Deuteronomy 24. It's a well-known debate, and I've mentioned it in the notes. He skips Deuteronomy 24 entirely. That's what they want: they want Him to open the Bible and say, "Well, here's what the Hebrew really means."

But He skips it. He says, “Let’s not go where the debate is; let’s not go to Deuteronomy 24. Let’s go back. Let’s go way back to Genesis 2.

“Original intention? No, we want You to weigh in. We want one group mad at You. We don’t really want to know the truth.”

He says, “I’m going to tell you the truth. We’re going to skip the controversy for now. We’re going to go back and find God’s heart, His original heart.” Then, when Jesus got around to answering it, He actually made both groups angry. He answered differently. He didn’t answer group A or B; He actually brought a higher standard. They were all upset at Him again. There’s no reason to believe that God’s servants, as we get closer to His return, won’t have to take the same stand and even have the same conflicts.

Both groups were mad at him when He answered. This young Man was amazing. I could see Him in front of all these people—no Bible school, no degree, but a whole lot of revelation and authority.

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL INTENTION FOR MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY?

In verse 4, He takes it back to Genesis 2. In verse 5, He says, “OK, what was the original intention, before there was ever sin? What was the original intention for marriage?” It’s the greatest gift that God gave human society. All of society is built around the sanctity of this covenant. If this covenant isn’t upheld, all society crumbles. This is a revelation given before there was sin. This isn’t a situational thing, where a group of people decide how they view this. This is God’s intention. He spoke from heaven about the sanctity of marriage. If this is right, all society will have a foundation. If this is wrong, all society will break. It’s this one issue of the sanctity of marriage. I could talk, and many of you could talk, for an hour, on the dominoes that fall when this one domino falls—of the emotional, social, spiritual, familial, and financial implications, one year, five years, ten years, and ten generations later, when that marriage covenant isn’t upheld. It’s remarkable how many dominoes fall. It takes a while, but it goes straight through society.

Again, I don’t want to go there. Most of you could get it. It’s profound how Jesus was holding the restoration of the nations in His hands on this one subject right here, the discipling of the nations. In our desire to disciple nations, to see every sphere of society impacted, we can’t skip this covenant.

In verse 5, He said, “Here’s the deal.” God’s original intention was for one man—notice it’s singular, one man. It’s not civil unions with four people, three people, two and a half people. It’s one man, one woman. That’s how God described it.

“A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER, AND CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE”

“A man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife” (Mt. 19:5, paraphrased)—cleave, or join. There’s a leaving and a cleaving. There’s a new union that’s established. Their first loyalty is to each other, even before their natural families. Their loyalty to each other is first, and their loyalty to their family and their ministry is second, following after that. If there’s not a proper leaving, there won’t be a proper cleaving. I’ve seen guys and gals, both men and women, who are still connected in an inappropriate way to mom or dad. They don’t leave properly. And they still have honor and love and present-tense relationship, but if you don’t leave right, you don’t cleave right.

This isn't really a marriage seminar; I just slipped into that for a moment. It's important to do that. The real point that I want to make germane to this message is that they become one flesh. That's the mystery right there. Two human beings in a unique way become one flesh before God. It's mysterious and powerful in ways that we don't fully understand, but God does. We can describe it a little, but I tell you, there are more mysterious dimensions of unity than we know.

“WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET NOT MAN SEPARATE”

How often have I counselled people over my thirty-five years of ministry? Back in my twenties, I saw a man get divorced. He didn't like his wife at all, and he was so relieved to be divorced. Finally, he was done.

It was some time afterwards.

“How are you feeling?”

“I don't know. I'm really depressed.”

I ask, “Why?”

“I don't like her, I don't miss her, but something is funny. I just feel weird.”

“Do you know why? You were literally joined to her, and that you didn't count on. You didn't enjoy her, but you didn't know there was a joining that was bigger than your ability to describe it.”

I've heard that in my twenties, thirties, forties. I've heard that testimony so many times. They're mystified. “It's a devil attacking me!” There may be some of that going on, but there's a union that's broken that's not easily broken.

Look at what Jesus said: “What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mt. 19:6).

When He says, “Don't let any man separate it,” he's not talking about a judge giving a ruling about divorce. He's saying, “Don't let another lover get in the way and separate this, and you commit adultery. Don't let another human break this physical bond. Don't let a man or a woman do that. Don't let anyone do this.”

“I don't love her anymore, and I love this one or that one or whatever.”

The Lord says, “Don't do it.”

There's a separation that you'll see that has more implications than meets the eye. When He says, “Let no man separate it,” He's actually saying, “Don't let another person get into that covenant and break the physical bond and establish a new bond.”

The Lord says, “I'm really against it if you do that. I'm really against that.” That's what the separation means. God defined marriage as exclusive between one man and one woman. It's the most exclusive human covenant there is. It's permanent. Throughout their lives, there aren't reasons to break it. Originally, there were no

reasons to break it; it was to be permanent. It's the only way that this covenant would work. Again, it's the key to all society.

WHY DID MOSES ALLOW A MAN TO DIVORCE HIS WIFE?

Paragraph C. They're saying to Jesus, "This isn't really what we were asking You. We didn't really want You to give us an overview of the glory of the sanctity of marriage. We wanted You to weigh in: are You for Group A, the conservatives, or are You for Group B, the liberals? Who are You for?"

Jesus says, "OK, I'll get there in a moment."

Look at verse 7: "Why did Moses command him to give her a certificate of divorce to put her away" (Mt. 19:7)? That's the passage from Deuteronomy 24.

They were saying, "Finally! That's all we wanted. Skip verses 3-6; we want You to start with verse 7. Talk about the time when Moses gave a command to give a certificate of divorce to put his wife away. That's what we want."

They wanted to get Him off of that big-picture message of the sanctity of marriage, and get into the debate. I'm just injecting this here. They sort of interrupted Him and said, "Hey, can we get to the point at hand? What about Deuteronomy 24? Weigh in!"

They completely misquoted the Scriptures, which is typical of the Pharisees. Jesus gave the answer, but they totally misquoted it. I'll tell you how they misquoted it. Moses commanded a certificate of divorce to be given to the woman for her benefit. He said, "I want you to take care of the woman." There are several societal reasons. If the woman didn't have that certificate, some negative social dimensions would occur. It was for the woman's benefit that the Lord commanded the certificate. If the man pursued the divorce, he had to take care of the woman.

That's what Moses was talking about, but they completely obscured this. They made it a command. Look, they even added a phrase: "Why did Moses command to put her away?"

The liberal camp said, "I'm sorry, wifey! Moses commanded me to drive you out if things aren't right. I love the Word of God. Out!"

Jesus is looking at them and saying, "Moses commanded you to put her away? I don't really think that's exactly what I told Moses, because I'm the One who told it to him. I commanded him to make provision for the woman in the certificate so that she was taken care of and protected from your abuse in it."

They twisted it. Anyway, we can break that down another day. My blood gets stirred up reading this. I say, "Ugh, those men."

You know what? We're all the same. Men then are like men now. I like men, but I tell you, there could be a cruel spirit even amongst the people of God when they have an agenda and they start twisting the Scriptures.

Finally, Jesus says, “OK, I admit it. In Deuteronomy 24, the much-debated passage, Moses did permit divorce” (Mt. 19:8, paraphrased).

MOSES PERMITTED DIVORCE BECAUSE OF THEIR HARDNESS OF HEART

Jesus adds the word *permit* because Moses didn’t command it; he permitted it. They wanted to put the word *command*, but He says, “No, I allowed it. I’m the One who told this to Moses. I said he could do it because of their hardness of heart.”

Hardness of heart? In what regard? Immorality sets in; the woman or the man falls into hardness of heart. “Dullness of heart,” is another way to say it, but even that sounds a little too soft. It’s the inability to be reconciled.

We don’t want to put this in the category of, “Hardness of heart? I don’t have that, so it doesn’t apply to me.” He meant the inability to respond in obedience in the realm of solving conflict in marriage and honouring the sanctity of marriage. They had the inability to follow through on that. Jesus called it “hardness of heart,” or dullness of spirit. They had agendas, they had offenses, they couldn’t get through to the grace of God to honor the marriage and solve the conflicts and show grace to one another. He called it “hardness of heart.”

JESUS SETS A NEW STANDARD FOR THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

So in verse 9 they say, “OK, Jesus. Give us the answer: are You a conservative or a liberal? Are You right wing or left wing?”

“Neither. The whole bird is sick. I’m the kingdom of heaven,” is what He’s saying. “I’m a whole different realm.”

He says in verse 9, “I’ll give you a standard that no one else has” (Mt. 19:9). This is startling. Both the conservatives and the liberals are troubled by this. It was a new revelation. Whoever divorces his wife, whoever and for whatever reason, except immorality—she was immoral, she was involved in sexual intercourse—and that man gets rid of her for a different reason entirely, and marries another woman, the man who drove her away committed adultery.

The conservatives said, “Wait, what? Moses didn’t say that.”

He said, “I’m taking it up a notch. I’m going to tell you how important this covenant is to God, of the joining of the flesh. Suppose the man has been faithful to his wife, the woman doesn’t commit adultery, but he loses his way with her. It isn’t happening anymore, and he puts her out and says, ‘That one is done,’ and he goes and gets remarried.” Jesus said, “That man who was sexually faithful all those years is actually now committing adultery.” That’s what happens. He says, “The woman is out there on her own now, and the man who comes along and marries her later commits adultery with her. You put her in a situation where she’s out on her own. She doesn’t have the economic ability to make it.”

In that world, a woman couldn’t make it on her own. They didn’t have the kind of situation we’re familiar with in the Western world, where a woman could make it in the marketplace. They couldn’t do it in that day. The lady had to get married. He said, “Do you know what happens? She will end up committing adultery.” You’re thinking, “Wow, this is complex stuff.”

DIVORCE IS PERMITTED WHEN ONE OF THE PARTNERS COMMITS IMMORAL ACTS

Paragraph D. He's talking about immorality. He gives the reason for divorce. He gives the Greek word *pornea*, which of course we recognize as the root of the English word *pornography*. It includes various kinds of immorality, not just physical adultery. There are other kinds of immorality: they're acts of immorality. That's the important part: they're acts.

Someone says, "Yes, but Jesus said if you think it, you're involved in it." That is true. If our standard is to walk in the new covenant purity, then we abstain from this even in thought. When it comes to applying this to life circumstances, it has to be based on acts: not even, "He was going to, but something stopped him," but actual acts.

It's like in the case of the man who is angry; Jesus said he's a murderer. You don't throw him in prison because he murdered in the heart. He has to commit an act of murder before he goes to prison. It's the same thing with adultery: it has to be an act. Not just a man with a woman, but a man with a man; there are all kinds. I don't want to give the three or four categories; you can figure that out yourself. The point is, there has to be action involved in order for divorce to occur. I remember one time over thirty years ago; I was just a new pastor in my early twenties. There were a thousand people in the room. We were having a confession time; we could say anything—testimonies, confessions, etc. There was this very sincere man; he got on the microphone in front of a thousand people. He had tears in his eyes. He said, "I have to confess to adultery."

He got up on the microphone, we had confession. We could say anything, testimonies, confession, etc., and he got on the microphone in front of a thousand people.

He gets up with tears in his eyes. "I have to confess adultery." People said, "Wow, our hearts are with you. What humility."

He's crying. The leaders are sitting in the front row. He points at one of the leaders' wives and says, "With her!"

The lady says, "AHH!" She's absolutely terrified; she's never met him.

He says, "Yes, it's true!"

The man in the back room says, "What?"

He says, "I tell you, I'm coming all the way with God. Nothing will stop me. I'm going to tell everything."

"When did you commit adultery with her?"

He says, "Regularly. I'm sitting over at those meetings looking at her. I've never met her." He doesn't get it. He says, "That lady, that's between her and God. I don't know if she's looking back at me. That is between her and God."

“No, no, bro, wake up.” The thing got all sorted out, but my point is this: the word that Jesus gave for immorality refers to acts, not thoughts. We care about the thought realm, but we don’t apply circumstances to thoughts of immorality and thoughts of murder. You don’t go to jail; you don’t get divorced because of thoughts. That applies in the realm where one of the spouses is connected to pornography. They have all these thoughts, but they haven’t acted them out. It breaks things; it isn’t good; it’s really hurtful, but it’s not grounds for divorce. There has to be an acting out.

Most people who are involved in pornography in any kind of regular way end up acting it out in physical adultery. There are occasions where people are caught in that snare and the spouse finds out, husband or wife, and sometimes they say, “Can I now divorce him or her?”

No, there haven’t been acts, just thoughts. It’s grievous, it’s not OK, but still, that’s not grounds for divorce. That isn’t what that word means.

WHOEVER FIRST VIOLATES THE PHYSICAL BOND IS THE ONE WHO BROKE THE COVENANT

Paragraph E. This is the most important principle of all. This is the controlling principle. You can apply this principle in many different situations if you get Paragraph E. I’m not necessarily saying it perfectly, but the principle is here. You might be able to say it better. Whoever first violates the physical bond of the marriage covenant, husband or wife, through sexual union with another person not their spouse, is the one who broke the covenant. That’s when the covenant is broken. It can be re-established, but it’s broken. If the man is involved in a sexual union with a woman he’s not married to, the marriage is broken right then, when the adultery takes place.

Let’s say time goes on and he marries that woman. The adultery doesn’t take place when they get married; it took place when they broke it and had that union initially. That’s when the adultery occurred.

Jesus goes on and lays the principle out. We’re going to look at it again. But I want to say this first: the adultery, the breaking of the covenant, occurs during the original marriage. That’s when the covenant is broken—before they even get a legal divorce. The covenant is broken before God.

The other spouse may say, “No, I understand it. I want to renew the covenant.” It’s back intact. Sometimes the man and woman get divorced; neither of them have done it; the man is dating around, and he gets involved with a woman sexually. I’m talking about sexual union with her. That’s when the covenant and the marriage vow are broken—right then. Maybe he marries someone else five years later. The marriage was broken from heaven’s point of view when he was dating around. That’s when it happened. That’s the principle we’re looking for.

Let’s look at Paragraph F. Jesus says the same thing, but a little differently. He says, “Whoever divorces his wife” (Mt. 19:9). Again, the man puts the woman away. They were both sexually faithful. He says, “You cause her to commit adultery.”

How does he cause her to do that? He causes her to do it because now she’s out of the home and has no economic support. There are two big implications. You have to read these two implications to understand this point. The first implication is this: she’s out of the home, she has four kids and nowhere to go. It’s desperate. Just imagine how horrifying this is. There are situations like this today. She gets married because of, let’s say,

the economic realities. She said, “I have to; there’s no other way.” When she has the physical union with that new partner, her new husband, that’s when the divorce takes place.

Jesus tells the man, “You drove her to that. You’re actually responsible. You put her in a position where she had no other way to care for her children besides getting married.” The moment they had the physical union, that’s when the adultery occurred—right there.

He says, “The man who married her committed adultery, too.”

The man comes along and says, “I didn’t even know you were married. You didn’t tell me the truth. How did I know?”

My point is this: he’s involved in an adulterous act that first time they come together.

The other unspoken implication is that the man who drove her out is not involved sexually with another woman. What happens, more often than not, is that he drives her out; she’s in desperation; he’s involved sexually with another person. That’s when the adultery takes place. She’s now free to marry, with no adultery associated whatsoever. Jesus left the two unspoken implications, but I believe we can see them pretty clearly, and as we apply these principles over time, they become more apparent.

DIVORCE IS ALLOWED IN THE CASE OF DESERTION FOR THE FAITH

III. Divorce is allowed for desertion. A. It’s desertion for the faith. You can read that on your own, but the point is this. Remember, 1 Corinthians 7 is the passage where Paul gives his most detailed perspective on marriage, much as Matthew 19 gives the most understanding of marriage in relation to Jesus.

Look at verse 15. Here it is, one key verse, although you want to read the whole thing in context. “If an unbeliever departs, let him depart. Let the new believing brother or sister not be under any bondage to the marriage covenant” (1 Cor. 7:15, paraphrased).

Here’s the situation: there are two unbelievers. Let’s look at a pertinent situation in the Islamic world. The Lord appears to the woman in a dream and says, “I’m Jesus.” She gets radically saved.

The man says, “No, that’s not going to happen. There are many reasons that can’t happen in my home: my faith, my family, my business, my heritage. No, you have to go right now.”

She’s actually being driven out, not because he’s a spiritually dull person. He says, “No, lady, you don’t get it. It’s an ultimatum. You’re to renounce Jesus now or you leave my home.” She actually goes out because of overt persecution, not because it’s a hard time at home and he doesn’t read the Bible and every time you have TBN on he changes the channel or something, or he curses at you when you try to pray. That’s not what’s going on. I’m not talking about harassment; I’m talking about an ultimatum for the faith. This has happened throughout history.

Paul addresses that person driven out by an ultimatum: “Deny Jesus or deny the marriage.” He adds something new that Jesus did not address. The gospel hadn’t been given to the Gentiles yet. It wasn’t a situation in Jesus’ hour, but now in Paul’s day, he’s bringing the gospel to the nations, and so now we have this new dilemma of

unbelievers. One of them gets radically saved, and he or she gets the ultimatum. Paul says, “You’re not under bondage to the marriage covenant. Go in peace.”

ONE BELIEVING PARTNER SANCTIFIES A FAMILY

Paragraph B. We’ll come to the end of this. Allen, I would like you to make a few comments. There’s a converted spouse: the lady gets saved, the man doesn’t. We’ll use the same scenario. The man gives no ultimatum. He’s an unbeliever. He says, “I think you’re crazy and I don’t like you and I think it’s a waste of your time.” He harasses her, but he says, “I’ll let you live here. I would prefer that you don’t because you bug me, but you can.” There’s no ultimatum: “Either you choose Jesus or you choose this marriage.” It isn’t that. It’s a whole different thing.

Paul says, “Stay. If he’ll let you stay, stay.”

Then he reverses it. The man gets saved; it’s the same principle the other way around. The man is on fire for the Lord, and the lady has no immorality, but neither has she any interest in the kingdom.

Paul gives a surprising perspective in verse 14. He says, “The husband is an unbeliever and the wife is a new believer. The children and in-laws are unbelievers.” In those days, the whole network lived next to each other.

Paul says, “You sanctify your family” (1 Cor. 7:14). That doesn’t mean that because you’re saved, they’re saved. Rather, he’s saying, “Because you’re saved and you’re in the home and you have the favor of God on your life, you’re a light.” They’re in a special position to receive a heightened influence in the Spirit in their life. He uses the term *sanctified* in that sense: they’re in a unique position where the grace of God is before them on a regular basis. They still have to become born again, but they’re in a great position to get born again.

He says, “Hang in there. If he’ll let you stay, stay. Win them.” He’s not a believer, or he’s a spiritually deadbeat believer: he doesn’t even have a pulse spiritually. The Lord says, “Be the sanctifying influence and win him. Get him jumpstarted in the faith he denied twenty years ago. Help jumpstart him.”

Paragraph C. Separated couples. It’s two believers, and immorality hasn’t been an issue. There are other issues but there hasn’t been the act of immorality, and there hasn’t been the ultimatum of persecution: “Either leave this home or leave Jesus.”

They’re separated. They’re not legally divorced yet, or maybe they’re legally divorced. It doesn’t matter. Physically, the bond isn’t broken. The physical bond is the one God sees. Man sees the legal paper; God sees the physical bond from back in Genesis 2 in the garden of Eden.

God says, “You’re still one flesh; that’s what I care about.”

“Yes, but we’ve already done the legal work.”

The Lord says, “You can do the legal work or you can undo the legal work. That’s another issue. The bond isn’t broken; this was My original idea back in Genesis 2. You’re still married.”

The man says, “Are they divorced or do they just live separately?” It doesn’t matter in this situation, because the bond, the physical covenant, is still intact. It hasn’t been violated yet.

Paul says there are extenuating circumstances where the woman says, “I can’t stay in the home. I can’t. I can’t even stay legally bound to him for economic reasons or other issues.” There are thousands of storylines. There’s no one sentence that answers all of them. I’m not even going to try. Paul says, “OK, but remain single, because the physical covenant hasn’t been violated yet. Though for your safety and other reasons you need to be separate, live before the Lord.”

If some time passes, and the man gets involved with another person physically, then the bond is broken. That’s a different situation. Then adultery has happened. Even if it’s ten years later, and you haven’t even lived together for ten years, and neither of you has been engaged with another person sexually, that physical bond is still intact.

The last thing I want to mention in terms of separation is the issue of physical abuse. Physical abuse is a hard subject to talk about because there are so many levels and all of it’s bad. Some people are looking for loopholes rather than the truth. They take the abuse card, from physical to financial to spiritual abuse, and they play it in a dishonest way. My goal here isn’t to figure out who is and who isn’t; that’s none of my business. My point is that before God, you want to be honest.

The man comes into the hallway and he’s angry and he pushes the girl out of the way. That’s wrong, but that’s not the kind of abuse I’m talking about. I’m not talking about running through the hallway and pushing her out of the way once. She says, “I have a photo! You did it. Legally, I got you.” We’re not playing a chess game to try and outmanoeuvre him so we can get him. We’re trying to obey God and see God’s heart. Let’s put that situation aside; who knows what’s what?

Again, it’s not my desire to figure that out for everyone’s life. The Holy Spirit will have wisdom on that. I’m talking about really intense physical abuse, whatever that means. I tell you, it’s a very serious subject and it’s not addressed in the Bible. It’s dangerous, it’s perilous, and we take it very seriously. Our approach as a leadership team is to get together and say, “Holy Spirit, there’s no category for this, but it’s serious. It’s dangerous.” We would seek the counsel of the Lord together to figure out what to do. We wouldn’t have a pat answer. I’m leaving that nebulous. That’s the only way we can approach it, but we don’t approach it casually.

Again, the financial abuse is real, the emotional abuse is real, the verbal abuse is real. I really appreciate that. I didn’t mean two minutes ago to demean that. I’m just saying, I’ve been around long enough to see people play the card to win the game, and that’s not the way we’re approaching this before God. We want it to be truth, because you can’t fake out God. He’s the witness of how we treat one another.

LET THE PERSON WHO IS ALREADY REMARRIED REMAIN MARRIED

Paragraph D. For any who have been divorced and remarried for any reason besides those two. The man says, “I’m married. Now what? Hey, I’ve been married for a year or ten years.” Continue in the marriage.

Some men would say, “Break the marriage.”

I strongly disagree with that. Stay in the marriage. You can't undo that. You can't put the thing back together. Here is what I would do. I look at the man who says, "I got divorced."

"Was there immorality in your life or in her life?"

"Not really. She just didn't like the man and I didn't like my wife and we got married." Then there was an act of immorality involved in the process of your marriage early on. Whether you were involved in it before you got married or the night you got married, I urge you to acknowledge that act of immorality.

Say, "Lord, we love You. We love Your ways, we trust Your wisdom, we blew it." It isn't casual. You don't have to tell everyone else about it, but between you and God, tell the Holy Spirit, "We grieved You on that point." You can't undo this thing.

I tell you, in your walk with God, you want to be honest with Him. Say, "Lord, forgive me."

The Lord says, "I have already forgiven you."

It will do something in your heart to have truth about that issue. There will be times where you'll share privately in a personal situation. You'll tell another couple, "You know what? We did the same thing and the Lord showed us a few years later that this was actually an act of adultery. It really was, and we were grieved. We never wanted to commit adultery."

I've talked to people, and some say, "If I mess around with her before we get married, then we're legal to get married?"

I say, "Yes, you are, if it's OK with you to commit adultery before you get married. Is that OK with you?"

They say, "I don't really want to, but if I must, I must."

I say, "Ah! I just can't bear that concept"—that casual concept of, "Yes, the adultery has been committed, and the marriage can happen." Don't you want to own that before the Lord, and talk to Him about it, and get His feelings about it? I don't mean to have Him rebuke you and make you feel bad and put you in the penalty box for a while. That isn't my point. The point is between you and Him; it creates another level of gratitude in your spirit for His kindness towards you. It creates another safety in your life, so to speak, so that you don't do it again. That confession and that dialoguing with the Lord about it creates a safety bump, so to speak, for the next time there's trouble in the marriage.

You want to be honest with the Lord. Once you have that settled, you don't need to make it known to other people. You might in certain situations if the Lord leads you to do that, but here's what you do: you stay on in the marriage. Again, you can't unscramble scrambled eggs. I think that's what I was trying to say. You can't unscramble scrambled eggs. Live with honor and dignity. Say, "Hey, we're married, and we're going on with the Lord." Have honor and dignity and confidence in your marriage.

They say, “Oh no, in a minute the curse is coming.” No, it’s not. The blood of Jesus took the curse. Sometimes there are emotional and social and financial troubles that come, but it’s not related to the judgment of God, or the curse of God, in that sense.

Be bold and know you can have an honorable marriage and you can go on with the Lord. His mercies are new every single day. We don’t need people having opinions about who did what and when; that’s not our business in the Body of Christ.

Amen.

ALLEN HOOD:

I don’t have much to say other than amen. Peter tells us that Lot’s righteous soul was vexed by the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet. 2:7). He was vexed. How many of you today feel vexed? Your heart is weighed down by the way divorce has impacted our culture, our nation, our churches. We would be hard-pressed to go through the top fifty leaders of the church in America and not see how divorce has riddled those leaders’ and our politicians’ lives, and the lives of our governmental officials, and the lives of our schoolteachers. It has vexed our souls and vexed us as a nation. Mike hit it: the dominion mandate was given to Adam and Eve. He said to a married couple, “Multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.” The dominion mandate can’t go forth without families that are in divine order that are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The evil one knows that. Even as you were saying this, Mike, I was sitting there in Malachi. The very first thing the evil one does is to try and prevent them from building the temple, which is the prayer ministry. He tries to undermine it. He brings assault against the prayer ministry to keep them from building the temple, but once they build the temple under the ministry of Zechariah and Haggai, what does he do then? He assaults the marriage. By the time of Malachi and Nehemiah’s day, he’s going after the marriages. He’s trying to kill the dominion mandate that’s rooted in intimacy, which is prayer, and that gets expressed through family units.

According to Psalm 127:5, marriage is crucial, because the godly children that are produced by godly marriages will contend with the enemy at the gate. There’s no ability to contend with the enemy at the gate when our marriages are being torn asunder and we have sipped from the spirit of the age, which is comfort and complacency and ease, instead of embracing the crucifixion in our marriage and going the way of servanthood.

I’m vexed by this. Mike, I agree with you. We don’t have time to point the finger. I’m so weighed down right now because I know in my own household—you can say it for your own—that I have experienced this. We’re probably all related to people right in our nuclear families and extended families that have gone through divorce. I have those examples of tragedy, and I’m still watching sin reap its consequences through the generations. My soul is weighed down. I’m undone by it. We have to begin to stem the tide and push the thing back, and it has to start in the house of God.

We want a position paper, but it’s more than giving a position paper. That’s what Mike has done, and we will come out with a large one, but we have to contend for marriage in America. We have to pray for it. First, we have to get our house clean.

I was just reading a proverb. It says, “The Lord’s words are pure words, and woe to the man who adds to them lest he be found out wrong and rebuked as a liar” (Prov. 30:5-6, paraphrased). We have added to God’s words.

We have made loopholes in the name of the spirit of the age. We have grown discontented with our spouses. I was thinking about how many spouses go to bed disillusioned, and one day the man awakens into a midlife crisis and realizes he hasn't quite been received in the way he expected, and he moves on. Yet the lady has gone to bed for forty years disillusioned every night at his inability to love in the way that Jesus loves. We have to have a revolution that's not just based around a position paper. We have to have a true move of the spirit of prayer, and Mike is inviting us into this.

We can't have a spirit of prayer unless we love our wives: unless we honor our wives, love our wives, serve our wives, and raise up godly children. I've watched my own mother and father-in-law go through that rocky stage of marriage that probably most marriages go through where you're at that crossroads. Do you stay with it? Do you hunker down? Do you push back through the disillusionment to do it God's way, to see God break in? I've watched them say yes to the marriage covenant, and then in their sixties they looked over and suddenly, out of nowhere, as their bodies began to break down and they shared that story together about persevering, they looked over and fell in love. They were like high school sweethearts. We said, "Dad, get a room. Stop it. Quit making out with Mom. Just go to the room. I don't want to picture this."

For the last ten years of their marriage, I have thought about this. In fact, she died just last year at this time. He says no one has ever loved him the way she loved him. They moved past the pressure years to persevere. Here is the good news: they have five children, all with godly spouses and godly marriages, who will not even entertain the word *divorce*.

Do you know why? They have already entertained a greater injunction, which is to cherish and nourish and serve your wives like Christ served the Church. It can't even get there. Then they have grandchildren. Every one of those grandchildren has professed the Lord. Every one of those grandchildren who are married has married godly spouses. We baptised our first great grandchild who professed Christ just last week at our family reunion. Ed Hackett baptised his oldest grandchild as a believer, and the lineage goes on.

Why does He hate divorce? Because He wanted Godly offspring. He wants it. Why? For dominion to contend with the enemy at the gates. The Lord broke in to the most divorce-riddled culture in the first century and turned it upside down and gave a great name for Christianity by hanging in there in this issue of marriage and godly children.

We have to turn the tide again in our own land, our own backyard, and we have to raise up a generation. I tell you what, I want to win the debate. I want the position paper clear, but I want to win the war in the place of prayer.

Let's stand.